

Read the short story. Then answer each question.

Mercury and the Woodsman

One of Aesop's fables

Long ago, a woodsman was chopping down trees along the bank of a river.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Each swing dug the axe deeper into the tree.



On his next swing, the axe flew from the woodsman's hand. It tumbled over and over until it landed in the river with a splash!

The woodsman stood on the edge of the river. The water reflected the sunlight, but the woodsman did not notice. With his axe in the river, he could not finish his work.

The Roman god Mercury was flying overhead. He was on his way to Mount Olympus to deliver a message. He saw the woodsman and decided to help.



“What seems to be the trouble, Woodsman?”

The woodsman looked up to see Mercury standing beside him. “My axe flew into the river.”

Without another word, Mercury dove into the river. He came up sputtering water and showed the woodsman a solid gold axe. “Is this one yours?”

The woodsman shook his head sadly. “No, that is not my axe.”

Mercury dove back into the river. This time he returned with a solid silver axe. “Is this your axe?”

The woodsman shook his head again, afraid he would never see his axe again. “No, that is not my axe.”

The third time Mercury dove into the water he came back with the woodsman's axe.



“That's my axe!” the woodsman exclaimed.
“Thank you.”

Mercury smiled and handed the woodsman his axe. Because the woodsman had been honest, Mercury also gave him the gold and silver axes. The woodsman could not believe his luck.

The woodsman hurried to tell his friends about his experience. One of the other woodsmen, a jealous and greedy man, wanted the same luck. So, the next day he went to the riverbank to cut down trees. Then he tried to find a way for his axe to fall into the river. First, he stood facing the river.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

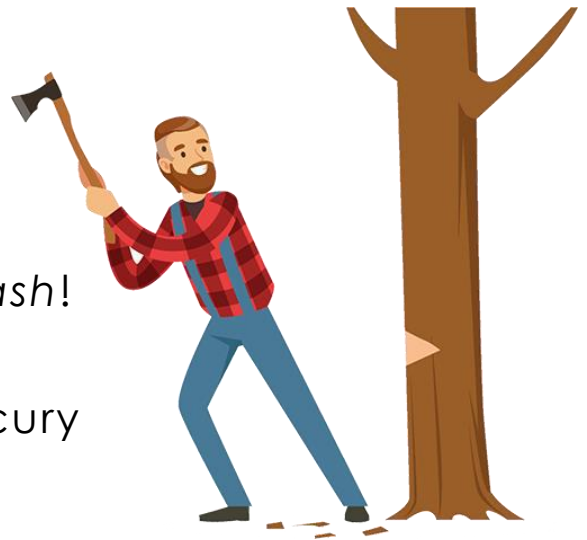
The greedy woodsman tried to let go of the axe and let it fly into the river, but it landed on the riverbank.

Next, he tried chopping with his back to the river.

Whack! Whack!

On the third *whack*, he let go of the axe. This time it flew into the river and landed with a *splash!*

As he had the day before, Mercury appeared at the man's side.



“What seems to be the trouble, Woodsman?”

Mercury asked.

“My axe flew into the river,” the greedy woodsman said, pretending to be sad.

Mercury dove into the river and came up, dripping with water, with a solid gold axe.

“Is this--?”

“That’s my axe!” exclaimed the woodsman. He reached for the axe.

Mercury looked at the man, angry at his lie, and tossed the golden axe back into the river. He even refused to get the greedy woodsman’s work axe from the bottom of the river. The woodsman stood by the bank in sorrow. He would have to buy a new axe before he could resume his work.



Questions:

1. What kind of axe did Mercury bring up first?

2. Why did Mercury give the first woodsman his own axe as well as the gold and silver ones?

3. Why did the second woodsman throw his axe into the river?

4. How did Mercury respond to the second woodsman claiming the golden axe as his own?

5. What is the moral of the story?

Answers:

1. What kind of axe did Mercury bring up first?
The first axe Mercury pulled from the river was a gold one.
2. Why did Mercury give the first woodsman his own axe as well as the gold and silver ones?
The woodsman was honest about which axe was his, so Mercury gave him all the axes.
3. Why did the second woodsman throw his axe into the river?
He wanted Mercury to give him gold and silver axes.
4. How did Mercury respond to the second woodsman claiming the golden axe as his own?
Mercury refused to give him the gold axe and left his work axe in the river.
5. What is the moral of the story?
(Answers may vary)
"Honesty is the best policy."